
Signs in Deaf Mute Education,

AN

EXPLANATION AND DEFENSE

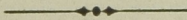
OF THE

AMERICAN SYSTEM OF DEAF MUTE EDUCATION.

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(From the New Englander for July, 1867.)

SIGNS IN DEAF MUTE EDUCATION.

The Education of Deaf Mutes; shall it be by Signs or Articulation? By GARDINER GREEN HUBBARD. Cambridge: A. Williams & Co. 1867.

Report on the Institutions for the Deaf and Dumb in Central and Western Europe, in the year 1844. By Rev. GEORGE E. DAY.

MR. WELD'S *Report of his visit to Institutions for the Deaf and Dumb in Europe*, 1844.

Report on European Institutions for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb. By HARVEY P. PEET, President of the New York Institution for the instruction of the Deaf and Dumb. 1851.

The Vowel Elements in Speech; a Phonological and Philological Essay, setting forth a new system of the vowel sounds, accordant with the mode of their formation by the organs. By SAMUEL PORTER, National Deaf Mute College, Washington, D. C. New York: B. Westermann & Co. 1867.

CHILDREN learn the language of their parents easily and spontaneously, not because they are children, though language is more easily acquired in childhood than at a later period, but chiefly because the meaning of words is revealed to them by circumstances. Thus, the mother says to an older child, "shut the door." The little one, with eyes and ears wide open, hears the direction and sees the act performed. So of learning a foreign language among a people who speak it.

When, however, the business of teaching, or rather of learning a language, is transferred from the family to the school, it is obvious that these great natural advantages for its acquisition must be in a measure lost. Comparatively few of the thou-

sand objects which fill a house, and daily come under the notice of the child, can be brought into the school-room, and if they were, they would be out of their relations to use.

Where, then, as in the case of those born deaf, the child must be removed from the family to the school, to learn language, the endeavor should be to find a method of instruction which will best supply these natural conditions; one which approaches nearest to home life, which can most successfully create or reproduce those circumstances on which the meaning of words depends.

Let us submit to this test, the various methods which at different times have been proposed or have been in use for imparting a knowledge of language to the deaf and dumb. These are, 1st. Articulation; 2d. Dactylology, or finger-spelling; 3d. Writing; 4th. Signs and descriptive action, in conjunction with writing and spelling.

We will take the deaf child to a school where he shall be taught articulation, and reading from the lips, where all signs, spelling, writing, and illustrative action, whether of the countenance or body, as means of instruction, are excluded. His powers of utterance, we will suppose, are first tried on the word *cat*. After days, it may be, of patient labor on the part of teacher and pupil, the task is accomplished. The word can be distinctly uttered, and can be read, also, from the lips, when pronounced by the teacher.

But in all this time, what has been done towards imparting to the child the meaning of this word? Nothing, absolutely nothing. If a *cat* had been brought into the school-room, if the picture of a cat had been shown, if a sign suggesting the object had been made, the name and the object might have been associated. But when all these means of indication are withheld, it is in the nature of things an impossibility that a meaning should be given to words so taught. They might be repeated till doomsday, and not the slightest hint of their purport would be suggested. And if no single word can have its meaning revealed by simply uttering it, much more hopeless would be the attempt to make manifest the meaning of whole sentences, by merely uttering the words which compose them. Apart from circumstances which, as we have seen,

are adequate of themselves to reveal the meaning, not only of single words, but of sentences, apart from the objects, or all semblance of them in pictures or descriptive signs, articulation, however perfect, can bring no intelligence into the mind.

The same remarks are applicable to dactylology and writing. By themselves they are incapable of giving any meaning to words. A look of the instructor, or attending circumstances, may give a clue to the meaning, but without some such aid, though all the words in the language should be spelled or written, and committed to memory, there would be no intelligence conveyed by them to the mind. They would be words without meaning.

We come now to the fourth method, viz. descriptive signs and illustrative action, in connection with spelling and writing. A class of twelve or fifteen children, all deaf, are assembled in the school-room. They know not the meaning of a word, nor even that words have a meaning. The teacher takes from his pocket a *ball*, and holding it up, writes the word—ball—on the large slate before them. He looks from the word to the object, gives a nod of assent, and thus they come to know that *ball* is the name of the round object with the use and nature of which they have long been acquainted. To commit this word to memory, it must be written by them many times, or spelled many times upon their fingers, or both. It is a great and difficult work, requiring it may be more than a day, to fix firmly in the memory the meaning and the written form of this first word. The second will be easier. Let the teacher seek for the name of one of the class. His handkerchief will show it. Instantly all are eagerly looking for their own names, producing their handkerchiefs. Their names are written and committed to memory. The teacher writes his own name, which they are made to understand by similar means. With these preparations, he takes the ball and throws it, and then writes, *Mr. ——— threw a ball*. He is asked what “a” means, and holds up one finger. The brighter portion of the class will conjecture at once, that the new word “threw,” means the act which they have just witnessed. And thus, these children gain as clear an idea of the meaning of the sentence, “Mr. ——— threw a ball,” as has the teacher him-

self. The language, too, with only this difference, that they have no conception of the sound of the words, means to them just what it means to persons who hear.

The scholars are next made actors in throwing the ball or other object, the name of which has been learned, and the more intelligent will write at once without assistance, *Master Smith threw a ball*, changing the name as often as the actor is changed, and changing the object whenever this is changed. Other verbs which can be illustrated in the school-room, are next introduced—such as drop, lift, bring, carry, eat, drink, go, come, sit, stand, walk, hop, laugh. But at length the actions which can be conveniently performed before the eyes of the pupils, will be exhausted. We wish to teach such sentences as “A boy climbed a tree.” Now the deaf and dumb, in talking with each other, represent a boy by putting the hand to the head, and taking hold of an imaginary hat, and then with the open hand, held horizontally, indicate the height of the wearer. A tree, they denote by holding the arm upright and waving it gently, the hand representing the tree top. Why should we worry ourselves in the vain endeavor to give an idea of such a sentence without signs, when it can be so easily and perfectly done by means of them? The tree waves here in the school-room, the boy advances and climbs it. The meaning could not be made more clear, if the class were taken into a forest, and a tree climbed in their presence. By signs, the act can be represented in a few seconds. To take the class to witness the actual climbing of a tree, might require half an hour.

Again, we write upon the slate the sentence, “A man shot a bear.” These children do not know the meaning of one of the words. We may show them a man, and then write the word. We may perhaps, by watching, see a man in the act of discharging a gun. But why wait for these contingencies? They all have probably seen a gun discharged. They have a sign in constant use for a man. A bear, most of them have seen, or his picture, and they denote him by his characteristic *hug*. We have then, only to make the sign for bear, locating him near or far, as we may choose, make the sign for man, and put him in an appropriate position, and all is plain. The gun is

brought down from the shoulder, the eye runs along the barrel, the trigger is pulled, and the bear falls dead upon the ground.

In order that we may have language, and intelligible language, there must be materials of which to make it. We may spell words, or utter words from the lips, yet unless there is some object or scene which these words are known to represent, we merely beat the air. No knowledge is conveyed, no real language is learned. But how are these materials of language to be brought into the school-room? All these children before us have seen enough and know enough of the affairs and ways of men, if it could only be brought before them, and *named*, to give them a wide circle of language. The ways of the family, the manifestations of a mother's love, the various processes in daily household labor,—the cooking, the washing, the ironing, the mending, the spinning, the ploughing, planting, sowing, mowing, the milking of cows, the making of butter and cheese, the feeding of chickens, calves, lambs, pigs, the driving of horses and oxen, the snowballing, sliding down hill, skating, fishing, bathing, cutting down trees, picking up chips, bringing in wood;—these and numberless other domestic scenes have all been narrowly observed or participated in by these silent boys and girls, but they do not know by what words to describe them. It will be of no service for us merely to utter or spell the appropriate words. The Lord brought the animals to Adam, before Adam named them. And we must follow this divine example. Ought not he, then, to be hailed by us as an invaluable helper, who could reproduce all these scenes in the school-room; who could present them with such vividness and fidelity, that the children should clap their hands with delight, and feel that their homes had been brought to them? But all this and more can be done by the use of signs, and as each object or scene is brought by their agency before the eyes of the class, the appropriate language can be given, given too with a distinctness which precludes the danger of mistake. There is but this one alternative. We must either bring the acts and objects which are to be named to the deaf child by signs, or we must take him to them, and in their presence while the events are occurring, impart to him the language which fitly describes them.

Signs are never directly taught. The deaf and dumb come gradually and spontaneously into the use of them, as children who hear and speak, do into the practice of speech. But let us seriously ask ourselves what would be the condition of the deaf and dumb, if this language of gesture did not exist, or were suffered to fall into disuse. If gathered into an institution, they still could have no intercourse with each other. Every day, for at least two-thirds of their waking hours, they must be doomed to silence. There would be no means by which their minds could be instructed or interested. Two or three years must thus be passed, or even more, if signs are forbidden to bear any part in their instruction. For a year or two, no attempt could be successfully made to impart religious knowledge. The very great value of signs as enabling the deaf child to express his thoughts and feelings, is worthy of special consideration. Some adventure in which he has been engaged may be burning like a fire in his bones. He has thoughts, wants, messages, which he would gladly make known. These he has only to express in signs, and his teacher can furnish him with the proper words for their communication in language.

The use of signs is in itself improving and elevating, especially so, when their grace and beauty are considered. It is impossible to handle such instruments without a reflex influence. All that has been claimed for the drama under the most favorable conditions, the effect on the imagination, the refinement of the taste, the development and elevation of the moral sentiments, may with greater reason be claimed for pantomime. By means of it, the simple narratives of the Old Testament, the story of Joseph, and Moses and Daniel, David's great fight with the Philistine, the sweet drama of Ruth, the royal perils of Esther, can be brought before the minds of the deaf and dumb with almost the freshness and power which a sight of the original scenes themselves would awaken. The infant Christ in the manger, the heavenly visitants to the shepherds, the wise child in the temple, the wonderful miracles, the wonderful words, and finally the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord, can be made to pass before the eyes of these children of silence. As one of those compensations of Divine Providence which thoughtful men have so frequent

occasion to notice, it happens that the deaf and dumb, with no knowledge of written language, shut out, in their isolated state, from all knowledge of the existence of God even, can yet have imparted to them by means of the beautiful and expressive language of gesture, a knowledge of religious truth, more vivid and full than other children ordinarily attain.

But not only is the language of signs an instrument of culture, and a means of knowledge in itself, but the process of transferring signs into artificial language is in the highest degree improving and strengthening to all the powers of the mind. The subject or narrative given must be clearly understood, the incidents in their proper order and relations must be held in the mind, right words must be chosen, and arranged according to the idioms of written language. The mere uttering of words in the exact order in which they have been spoken, is a work for parrots, requiring little or no exercise of mind.

Because the opinion has been expressed by some metaphysical writers, that the deaf and dumb, accustomed from infancy to the use of signs, rarely attain to the habit of thinking in words, the conclusion is hastily drawn by Mr. Hubbard, that their knowledge of written language must necessarily be very imperfect. But may there not be a very good knowledge of a foreign tongue, while yet the mind does not use it in meditation? Mr. Hubbard, we presume, speaks more than one language, but does he not *think* in English. It is not the degree of acquaintance merely, but the degree of use, especially of recent use, which determines the fact of thinking in a language. If we admit that the deaf and dumb, while at school, do not get a sufficient acquaintance with language, or rather that they do not use it sufficiently to make it the instrument of their thoughts, it does not follow that such a result may not be reached subsequently, when they will be compelled by their circumstances to use language more and signs less. The two faculties employed in the acquisition of language, reception, and use, are quite distinct. From the nature of the case, and in spite of all that can be done, the former of these will be more exercised at school than the latter. That is, the pupil will receive and understand language better than he can use

it. But when he leaves the institution, his circumstances will be very nearly reversed. He will be compelled to employ language as well as to understand it, and a very marked improvement is noticed in the readiness and freedom with which pupils of ordinary intelligence use language in the first year or two after leaving school.

It is usually assumed that we, who hear, think in words, because in rapid thought, no trace of anything beyond or aside from words, is left in the mind. But is it certain that the mind does not know that a clock is ticking, because it does not consciously notice it? Let the ticking cease, and would not this be observed? Some apprentices to a jeweler discovered that their master would sleep soundly while the hammers were going, but would instantly wake if they ceased. If they wished to play, it was only necessary to detail one or two to keep up the music of the hammers, and they were as safe from detection as if their master had been locked up in the city prison. All which seems to require this paradoxical statement, while the master heard, he slept, when he could not hear, he waked.

Let the words horse, cow, mule, pass rapidly before the eyes, and we shall say, perhaps, that we saw nothing but the words; that there was no image, or shadow underneath. But if we pause a moment on each word, the form, or some characteristic feature of the object which the word represents, will come into the mind, and very nearly, if not quite displace the word itself. The deaf and dumb are children in mental development, not accustomed to watch the operations of their own minds. Their testimony, therefore, on so difficult a question as to what are with them the instruments of thought, would not be of great value.

But supposing that the deaf and dumb do always think in signs, and always will, this does not prove that they do not understand written language, or that they get their ideas into words by a slow and painful process. Even if we should admit that the intermediation of signs does retard somewhat the rapidity with which words are read and understood by the deaf and dumb, we think a very plausible argument might be framed, to show that this retardation would be an advantage, rather than a detriment. What is the great reason that words

make so little impression on us? Is it not because they pass so quickly through the mind? Let a text of the New Testament be translated from the original Greek, and though it be rendered in the very words of the Common Version, a power and fullness of meaning will be found in it, which have never been seen before, and simply because, in this process of translation, every word was necessarily dwelt upon until its real and full meaning was seen and felt. "We never can fully understand our own language," says Stuart Mill, "until we translate another language into it."

But again, it is considered a great advantage, in the study of words, to know their roots. The fullness and power of a word are greatly augmented, as all readily concede, by such a knowledge of its history and birth. It is not felt by learned men to be an evil, when they see a word, that their minds run back to its root. Now, the signs which the deaf and dumb associate with words are, for the most part, just such aids to knowledge and enjoyment, and even greater, than are the roots of words. Our conclusion then is, that so far as expressive signs intervene between words and thoughts, in the minds of the deaf and dumb, they are a benefit rather than an injury, giving language more life and power than it has to other persons.

We come now to another use of signs, viz., as a means of determining whether written or printed words are understood by the deaf and dumb. A passage has been committed to memory, it matters not now, whether by articulation, frequent spelling, or writing. Are the words thus learned comprehended? A most important inquiry. How shall we determine? We might require the pupil to express the ideas of the passage in other words of the same import. But his knowledge of words is too limited to enable him to do this. If he were a speaking and hearing child, we might assume, as is done in our common schools, that if he did not understand now, he would at some future period, and thus allow his memory to be loaded with words which give him no pleasure, because destitute of intelligence. Said a little girl to us the other day, "I don't understand my geography at all. It is all about the judicial and the executive. I don't understand a word of it." For ourselves, we think it a sad thing for any children to

be taught, or, rather, abused in this manner. In the case of those who hear, we may console ourselves with the thought that light will come by and by. But no such comforting reflection is possible in respect to the deaf and dumb. If they do not understand the words now, there is little reason to suppose that they ever will.

And here we cannot help remarking, that a mind which can commit to memory page after page of words, without knowing, or caring to know, their meaning, is but a slight remove from idiocy. But why should this folly ever be permitted in a child, especially in one who is deaf and dumb, when we have in our hands an easy and infallible means of determining whether the words taught are understood or not? If the deaf and dumb pupil can give the exact idea of the passage learned by signs, he of course understands it. On the one hand, we require him to translate signs into language, to improve his knowledge of language, or to show his facility in the use of it. On the other, we require him to translate language into signs, to assure us that he understands the language. What folly to reject or despise an instrument of such value, both as a means and test of knowledge!

The following incident shows how liable words are to be misconceived by those who are cut off from that knowledge which comes from circumstances and daily use. There is a story current that an old gentleman, quite zealous for orthodoxy, once visited the American Asylum, and to assure himself of the religious instruction of the pupils, wrote on one of the slates, "What is the chief end of man?" A bright boy, looked earnestly at the question for some time, and then, with the exultant rush of a discoverer, turned to his slate and wrote, "I am not sure, but I think it must be his *head*."

Looking now, for a moment, at practical results, the only decisive test after all of the value of methods of instruction, we ask, what is actually accomplished by the method of teaching the deaf and dumb now commonly practiced in this country, viz., by signs, in connection with dactylology and writing? What attainments do they make in language? The answer, if truly made, must be that there is a wide diversity in the results attained. Some succeed so well as to show in the use of lan-

guage no traces of their infirmity. Others exhibit many peculiarities and imperfections. These differences may be traced to two prominent causes, original difference in capacity, or insufficiency of the time they have been under instruction. The most remarkable results by any method—particularly is this true of articulation—have been attained where the whole time of an instructor has been given to one or two pupils for many successive years. Such a devotion to individual pupils is of course impracticable in a public institution. But there is need of reform in all our institutions in this respect. The classes, if not made very small, should at least be so graded that those of nearly equal capacity and attainments should be taught together. More teachers would be required, and the expense would be increased; but it is in vain to look for the highest results until this is made the invariable rule. The dull pupils will become discouraged or be driven to despair, by being required to do more than they can. The bright ones fall into impatience or laziness by having too little to do. Moderate capacities in the deaf child are no bar to the ultimate attainment of language. It is only necessary to take more time, to proceed more slowly and with more repetition. Some are doubtless discouraged and sink into careless inefficiency, who, if they had been led along more slowly might have made good scholars. As precisely the same period is allowed for the instruction of pupils of every grade, and as this period is not too long for the very brightest, it must needs be too short for the proper instruction of those who are dull in intellect. But with these exceptions and explanations, we are prepared to say that such a knowledge of language, and such power in the use of it, is acquired by the great body of the pupils in our institutions for the deaf and dumb, that they are thereby practically restored to society. They correspond with their friends. They read books and newspapers. They know what is passing in the world around them, and feel that they are a part of it and not excluded from it.

Such being the effect of education on the mind of a deaf child, it is well to consider how it is with him personally. How does he succeed in making his way among men? Can he make himself understood, and easily understood? Or is he

still avoided as one of another race, with whom hearing and speaking persons can have no communion and hold no intercourse? Is his knowledge of signs an advantage or a disadvantage to him? Is he, and must he be, an outcast and a wanderer, simply because he cannot utter words from his lips? Does he find men and women who have hearing and speech willing to converse with him by writing? These questions obviously cover the whole ground. The reply to them is easy. The great majority of our people, in the first place, have sufficient education to enable them to understand writing and to communicate with the deaf and dumb by that means.

2. Their interest in these children of misfortune is uniformly so great as to make them quite willing to submit to the extra labor and perplexity attending this mode of communication.

3. Signs are always a most attractive feature to all classes of people. They are delighted to see them, and especially pleased that they can understand them. In fine, the deaf-born, having received such an education as our institutions are able to give, are objects of favor and interest with all men. They fill, usefully and profitably, the various trades in which speaking people are employed. Not a pauper, a few years since, was to be found among the graduates of the American Asylum. And finally, what is more and better, they are made acquainted with the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, and are many of them bright examples of piety.

Before closing this Article, it might naturally be expected that we should make some more particular reference to articulation, as an accomplishment to be taught the deaf. We call it an accomplishment, for a means of instruction, except in a very limited degree, it is not. The excessive desire which some parents feel that their deaf-born children should be taught to speak, arises, we are persuaded, from a wish to forget or conceal from themselves the terrible fact that their children are deaf. But though, by the trickery of artificial speech, they may appear less deaf to them, they are none the less so to themselves. A silence, such as finds no image for comparison, reigns and must reign in their souls. The repugnance felt by some to writing and spelling, as a means of communicating with the deaf, is due in part to its strangeness, and may be

expected to pass away by use. An equal and even greater embarrassment is experienced, when, for the first time, we attempt to speak through an ear trumpet. We can think of nothing to say. We find it difficult to realize that we are talking to a person. But there should be some better reason for teaching articulation than that the parent may be aided in forgetting the terrible infirmity which has fallen upon his child, or that it is easier or more agreeable for the parent to hold intercourse with him by words than by spelling and writing. The only question that enlightened parental love should ask is, what will be most agreeable to my unfortunate child, what will be *best* for him?

Is then articulation agreeable to the deaf-born child? Is it a pleasure to him to exercise the vocal apparatus, so far as such exercise is practicable to one in his circumstances? No. The effort to speak is inexpressibly wearying and painful to him. Even those who had learned to speak before the loss of hearing, feel a great repugnance to using the voice as a means of communication. The reason is obvious. There is with them not only an entire absence of the pleasure which other children have in hearing the sound, and the pleasant modulations of their own voices, but there is a positive pain in these vocal utterances. "It hurts." In some of the German schools it is admitted that serious injury sometimes results. One young man of great promise and excellence died from hemorrhage brought on, as was confessed, by violent and unnatural straining of the lungs in the attempt to teach articulation. In all ordinary and natural use of the muscles, nature has provided a safeguard to prevent their being injured by excessive straining. We never lift or pull as much as we can, because it hurts so much that we are constrained to stop. Were it not for this warning we should, in moments of excitement, tear our muscles and tendons in sunder. In the use of the voice we have two safeguards: first, the ear, which notifies us at once of any unnatural strain, by the disagreeableness and strangeness of the tone; secondly, the pain in the vocal organs themselves. But where the hearing is lost, and the vocal organs have never been exercised, how shall the deaf person determine when he is injuring his voice and lungs by too vio-

lent or persistent efforts? The ear cannot tell him. The cries of pain that the organs give out, he is told must not be regarded, because they are the effects, not of over-exertion but of disuse. It may pain us greatly at first to move a stiff limb, but unless we bear the pain and continue to move it, we can never recover the use of it. So the deaf child is instructed in regard to the organs of his voice. This pain is owing to the disuse. By and by it will be less. With nothing, then, in nature to hold him back from over exertion, is it strange that great and fatal injuries sometimes result from these unnatural efforts?

A deaf and dumb gentleman writes to us that he became deaf from scarlet fever, at the age of five years; that on recovering from his illness he had lost all memory of sound, could not repeat even the names of his parents or sisters. "I was at once sent to school to be taught to spell, but the pronunciation of the words had no understanding. So I was let loose, like a young colt, to ramble over the hills, screaming and making all sorts of noises, to bring my vocal organs into action." The effect of articulation upon his vocal organs he thus describes. "*At the start I feel the voice come through my nose, and it comes out only very low. As I proceed, my nose is stopped up, and then I feel a tickling in my throat, and my eyes give vent to tears, and I am obliged to stop.* I was for three years under the care of a professor of articulation, but could make no improvement in my voice." Dr. Kitto, who lost his hearing at twelve, says that he almost immediately found himself unwilling to talk, and it was only by stratagem that he was prevailed upon to do so.

What do learned physicians tell us is the origin of the clergyman's sore throat? Simply an unnatural and mechanical mode of speaking. They say, if the clergyman would throw away his manuscript and allow his thoughts to telegraph through the nerves to the vocal apparatus, there would result such a gentle and beautiful play of the vocal muscles, that none would be wearied or overstrained. Speech, in its effect upon the vocal organs of one born deaf, is very much like what a violent fit of coughing is to our throats. It rasps and tears. Articulation is distasteful to the deaf child, in the second place, because it takes so long a time to acquire it. "It

is the testimony of German teachers," says Prof. Park, of Andover, Mass., the most recent visitor of the German schools, "that pupils who are taught articulation only four or five years, will soon abandon it, but if they are taught seven or eight years they will continue to use this method of intercourse." No wonder if, like the children of Israel in the wilderness, they murmur and repine, and think they shall never come into Canaan. Indeed the comparison is more apt than we supposed when it first occurred to us. For the number who actually arrive at satisfactory results, are but the Calebs and Joshuas of the great multitudes who commenced the journey.

Articulation is distasteful to the deaf, thirdly, because they know that their voices are not agreeable. Sometimes they may exaggerate this, and sometimes it is impossible for them to do so. The filing of a saw, and the shriek of a steam whistle combined, could not produce a more disagreeable sound than that which is made in *some* of these artificial attempts at speech by the deaf and dumb. Knowing that their voices are so disagreeable, is it to be wondered at that they should be unwilling to carry on their intercourse with others by means of speech? What do we think of parents who are stupid or cruel enough to insist that their children, who have neither voice nor ear, shall sing before strangers? and what ought we to think of parents who would impose a still more disagreeable duty on their deaf-born children, by requiring them to speak in the presence of others?

But it may be said that the feelings of the child are of little consequence, provided we secure to him the highest good. What then are the advantages of articulation? Does it benefit the minds of those who practice it? Is it useful to them as a means of instruction? If all signs are excluded where articulation is taught, as it is claimed they are in the small school recently opened in Chelmsford, Mass., then we may say that however great the attainments of the deaf child may be in articulation, his mind will still be in darkness. If he is taught language by other practicable methods, he is a sufferer to just the extent that his time has been taken from these methods in his efforts to acquire articulate speech. If one-third of his time has been occupied in this way, then in a course of in-

struction running through six years, he has lost two entire years. But will not articulation enable the deaf to communicate with the hearing and speaking world, and thus be of incalculable benefit to him? Deaf children, taught by the methods pursued in our American schools, have three modes of intercourse with others, either of which they can use at pleasure; viz., writing, spelling, and descriptive signs, while the child who has been taught to articulate has but this one method: that is, it is laid down as a necessity that he must not practice other methods, for if he does he will lose this. Now we should not hesitate to challenge a comparison between the best scholars in the German schools and in our own, as to the ease and readiness with which they could receive and communicate ideas. It would be found that while our best pupils could receive ideas on all subjects to any extent by writing, and could communicate their own in the same way with no liability to mistake or misconception, the labor of conversing with the deaf by speech and reading of the lips, is so great and difficult and wearisome to all parties that, as a matter of fact, in general intercourse, none but the most necessary things are introduced into conversation. The conversations are made as brief as possible, and both parties are equally thankful when they are over. It will be found that this difficulty of intercourse by speech will increase in proportion as the deaf child is withdrawn from cultivated people, and thrown among tradesmen and mechanics. They will talk with him no more and no longer than absolute necessity requires. The results of the system will then be these. As articulation is an irksome and painful process when the pupils cease to be driven to it by their teachers, they gladly let it drop. It is so difficult for them to make themselves understood, and for them to understand others, that they become discouraged and cease to speak at all. Speaking is attended with such embarrassment and difficulty that there is a constant temptation to abridge and shorten as much as possible, until their speech becomes a mere skeleton of language, a sort of signs in words. Such a mode of speaking involves at length the loss of the structure of sentences, takes away all pleasure from reading or renders it impossible, and thus the process is one of constant deterioration.

With our best pupils, on the other hand, favorites wherever they go, writing, spelling, or making signs as the exigency may require, able to make themselves understood in any company by signs alone, winning regard and information from all with whom they come in contact, able to read books with increasing pleasure as years pass on, mingling with society with comparatively little sense of isolation, how wide the contrast!

We have confined the comparison hitherto to the best pupils of the two schools. But there is one painful fact which must not be omitted. Not more than one-fourth of those taught in the German schools attain such a knowledge of articulation as to be of practical benefit to them, while in our own schools every child not deficient in capacity is made acquainted with written language. "It is a very sad feature," says Professor Vaisse, "of the schools where what has been called the German system is more thoroughly carried on, that a very large proportion of their pupils are dismissed before completing their course of instruction, on the score of their being unable to speak, and consequently to be taught anything at all in such institutions."

Mr. Henry W. Syle, who has recently visited all the important British schools for the deaf and dumb, writes that not one in thirty of those born deaf receive any benefit from articulation, and that in a great majority of other cases, the attempts to teach it are failures. Mr. Syle is a nephew of the late lamented Henry Winter Davis, of Baltimore, and a most competent witness.

It is not difficult to explain the mistakes so often made by intelligent men in their examination of foreign schools. In the first place they go abroad with no knowledge of our own schools for the deaf and dumb, as it respects either their system of instruction or the results attained by it. Secondly, they suppose that articulation is a new thing, when there are at all times in our American schools persons wholly deaf, who can both speak and read from the lips. Thirdly, they are ignorant of the fact that it is only those, with rare exceptions, who lost their hearing after having learned to speak that are taught anywhere to articulate with success.

It would, doubtless, be of advantage to all children if they

could have instruction as to the manner of using the vocal organs in uttering the various sounds, both simple and compound, which enter into spoken language. As it is, the child's only endeavor is to imitate his parents. If the speech of the parents is defective, the child's will be so. But where the speech of the parent is perfect, or very nearly so, the speech of the child may be marred by great defects. These, in part, he may copy from others, but very much of the imperfection of speech is to be imputed to a natural indolence of the muscles of the voice. Certain sounds are more difficult to utter than others somewhat resembling them, and there will be a constant tendency to substitute the easy for the difficult.

The Yankee dialect so admirably exhibited by Professor Lowell, in the Biglow Papers, is not merely the imitation, by one generation, of the manner of speaking of its predecessor, but is a result of this indolent and shirking habit to which all the muscles of the body are more or less inclined. Thus, to say "hender" is much easier than to say "hinder," "wal" is easier than well, "ith" than with. That this mode of speaking is due very largely to this natural tendency to shirk labor in the vocal muscles, that is, to substitute that which is easy for that which is more difficult, was strikingly illustrated in an experiment which we lately tried. We requested a semi-mute to read to us Zekle's courtship from the Biglow Papers. He did not at once understand the meaning of the words under the new form of spelling, but it was a pleasure to see how much easier he found it to pronounce them after this manner than in the correct mode. Probably there is no nation on the face of the earth whose mode of uttering the words of their language is so defective as ours. Very grievous mistakes are not only made in the utterance of the vowel sounds, but the tongue and the lips seem often to refuse to perform their office in uttering the consonants.

By all means then let us have teachers of articulation, but let them begin with those who hear. Let the children in our schools be taught not to rant in declamation, but to utter correctly all the vowel sounds of the language. Let them learn to open their mouths, let them be made to understand by actual experiment that it is the immovable position of the upper

lip which causes for the most part the disagreeable habit of talking through the nose—let them avoid distressing precision of utterance on the one hand, and a shameful neglect of all care for distinctness and completeness on the other. Let words be made to come out from their mouths as coins newly dropped from the mint. When those to whom God has given all their senses, have learned to speak, then perhaps we may favor attempts to impart to the deaf also this great accomplishment.

